

What happens to iSchool graduates? Using career data to support iSchool engagement initiatives

Susan Rathbun-Grubb, Doctoral candidate, School of Information and Library Science – University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Community engagement is becoming an area of strategic focus for institutions of higher education. An institution's commitment to do meaningful work that is beneficial to the world outside its borders is neither unique nor new; however, several forces are fueling an even greater interest in marrying institutional objectives with those of the larger community and changing the ivory tower to an "ivory commons." Funding agencies and taxpayers are placing greater scrutiny on the fiscal and social responsibility of the stewards of grant funds and institutional resources. Technology not only makes international and inter-institutional collaboration easier, but it also encourages public access and response to the results of research. Social networking and Web 2.0 applications are making collaborative input less of a novelty, and more of an expectation of access. Institutional engagement is now officially recognized – a new elective classification for Community Engagement was recently added to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education that identifies "important aspects of institutional mission and action that are not represented in the national data.... [i.e.], the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity"(The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2008).

iSchool collaboration with local, national or global constituencies can be promoted through curricular programs, community outreach, and partnerships with other nonprofit and for-profit institutions and organizations on research and projects. iSchool faculty, students, and supporters, including alumni, all play a role in planning, promoting, implementing, and sustaining these engagement efforts. Research institutions that are committed to community engagement will need data from a variety of sources to make these initiatives successful.

Career tracking of graduates can provide iSchools with useful data for strategic planning of programs and engagement activities. For some programs, alumni may be an untapped resource, and regular communication with those who are interested opens up potential partnerships with them, their associates, and their employers. Career surveys can be used to assess this interest and solicit ideas for collaborative ventures. Analysis of career data can also help iSchool educators find out what types of jobs their graduates are taking and the variety of organizations that employ them, as well as the graduates' perceptions of how well the program prepared them for their professions. This type of information informs curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, internship placement, research project planning, and the establishment of community partnerships. Retrospective surveys allow an iSchool to reconnect with alumni who may welcome

the opportunity to re-engage with the program and faculty, conduct research or provide support, or offer internships and learning opportunities for students.

While the research literature on information technology careers explores issues such as recruitment, retention, job satisfaction, and continuing education needs, little is known about the career progression of information science graduates. This study analyzes a subset of the data collected for the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS) project, a large-scale retrospective career survey of graduates of six North Carolina LIS programs (1964-2007). The project is an interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers in library and information science and sociology and has resulted in the collection of data that are useful to multiple constituencies.

The subset of data consists of respondents who graduated with a master's degree in information science from two of the North Carolina LIS programs (1988-2007), N=171. All respondents completed a web survey consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions about their education and employment history; they were also asked about their current ways of keeping in touch with their LIS program and their interest in continuing this connection. Recent graduates (2001-2007) were asked to assess their LIS program and to describe their job search experience.

This poster will present results of the WILIS survey that may support the respondents' iSchool programs in planning for engagement initiatives and curriculum development. Descriptive findings will include job titles and responsibilities, types of employing agencies and job settings, prior and subsequent educational pursuits, level of satisfaction with the information science field, leadership roles, and level of involvement in professional associations and information science and technology conferences. The graduates' motivations for pursuing the information science degree and their assessment of the LIS programs provide useful insights that program faculty and administrators can use for recruitment and program planning. This type of survey research may provide a model for iSchool educators who wish to maintain contact with graduates who are interested in sustaining curricular and research partnerships beyond graduation. Since alumni migrate to other areas of the state, country, and world, and work in a variety of positions and industries, there is the possibility of diverse opportunities for research and projects that cross borders of all kinds. Collaboration with new partners discovered through alumni tracking can benefit the iSchool program, the institution, and the larger community.

Works Cited